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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 38th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 25 November 1997, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. ALSTON
later: Mr. GRISSA

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS (agenda item 6)

(a) REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT (continued)

Third periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (continued) (E/1994/104/Add.11; E/C.12/Q/UK/1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of the United Kingdom took places at the Committee table.

Article 10. Protection of and assistance to the family (continued)

2. Mr. PIFOOT (United Kingdom), responding to questions about spouses and fiancés of immigrants joining persons present and settled in the United Kingdom, said the requirements under the immigration laws were that the parties should have already met, in the case of fiancés, and that they intended to live together in their own accommodation without making additional recourse to public funds. The sponsor must be able to support his or her spouse. If the sponsor was already receiving public funds, such assistance would be accepted as an existing burden and the sponsor would continue to receive it after the arrival of the spouse or fiancé. As to the comments on the excessively strict behaviour of immigration officers, Mr. Adekuoye himself had accepted that the immigration system was often abused and he would point out that it was therefore necessary to take preventive measures, particularly against document forgery.

3. Officially recognized refugees became eligible for immediate family reunion with their spouses and under-age children who were their dependants prior to the application for asylum. A distinction was to be made between persons who were accepted as refugees and those who were not considered refugees within the meaning of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. In the latter case, it was possible to be granted exceptional leave to remain, although it might not always be clear for how long such exceptional leave would last. It was generally accepted that, if the person had been present in the United Kingdom for four years, he or she was likely to stay and therefore the spouse and under-age children would be allowed to enter the United Kingdom.

4. The rules governing admission of the children of lone parents in order to settle in the United Kingdom were not very explicit, but it was clear that a settled person would be allowed to bring in relatives if they would otherwise be living alone. Care of unaccompanied children from overseas was guaranteed under the Children Act 1989. Some 440 such children were currently being looked after by local authorities in the London area, as were an additional 4,006 persons who formed families with children. All children of compulsory school age, regardless of their immigration status, had a right to education.

5. The Housing Act 1985 did not define the term "household", which was a useful expression for administrative and general purposes. The Act used an

expression to describe households as people and "persons associated with them". The unit colloquially described as a household included married couples, cohabiting couples, people living together in the same accommodation, or relatives and children with a parent living with them.

6. The incidence of domestic violence was very serious. Moreover, the phenomenon knew no boundaries and could be found in all social classes and emerge at any time during a marriage. The causes of such violence were the same as those that could be identified worldwide. In the United Kingdom, domestic violence accounted for 43 per cent of all violence against women. Over 6,000 physical assaults had been recorded as domestic violence in 1996. In 1993, 17,000 households had been accepted for permanent rehousing by local authorities where the reason given for the loss of the last settled home was the breakdown of a relationship with a violent partner. Refuge was provided for over 45,000 women and children seeking to escape domestic violence every year. It was a very serious problem. The written reply to paragraph 58 of the list of issues described legislative measures enacted to curb domestic violence, namely, the Family Law Act 1996, the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 and an amendment to the Children Act which would henceforth permit the removal of the offender from the household rather than the child, as was now the case.

7. Positive results had been achieved in experimental programmes, which involved probation and compulsory attendance at group counselling sessions. It had been observed that the programmes had a higher success rate than court orders in reducing the frequency of violence against women. Compared with persons who were imprisoned, subjects who had participated in rehabilitation programmes committed far fewer repeat offences of violence. Approximately 80 per cent of the individuals who were imprisoned became repeat offenders, as opposed to less than 40 per cent of those who had been counselled.

8. Ms. THORNE (United Kingdom) said the Department of Health was concerned about the incidence of domestic violence and had launched two initiatives to address the problem. It had sponsored a series of regional workshops involving social services departments in England and a selection of other key statutory and voluntary services. The aim of the workshops was to update agencies on the legal, policy, practical and research issues related to domestic violence. The workshops would culminate in a national conference on domestic violence in January 1998 to promote the messages from the regional workshops and analyse current developments in domestic violence, with a view to determining the strategic significance of those developments for local authorities and health and voluntary workers.

9. Mr. Grissa (Vice-Chairperson) took the Chair.

10. Mr. SADI said that the post-industrial era had brought with it many social problems. He did not believe the solution could be sought through workshops and legislative measures alone, without paying due regard to the sources of the problems and strengthening the family structure. Was there a plan to address the crux of the problem, namely the breakdown of the family unit?

11. Mr. TEXIER asked what the procedure was for dealing with individuals who had been refused refugee status, but were clearly at personal risk in their country of origin. Was it possible to make special arrangements - for instance, with third States for the protection of such individuals? In his opinion, the issue would arise more and more frequently, especially at the European level, and he would like to know how the United Kingdom Government intended to deal with it.

12. The CHAIRPERSON asked about the fate of Hong Kong residents who were not recognized as Chinese citizens and had been granted British passports. Had they been accepted for entry into Britain, and what was their status?

13. Mr. RATTRAY referred to the recent Utting Report, entitled People Like Us, which had suggested that, despite extensive legislative mechanisms, there had been a failure in the system for the protection of children, arising from the reduction in the number of children's homes and diversion into foster care which had led to a number of cases of abuse. He asked whether the incidence of child abuse under those circumstances was an acknowledged fact, and how it would be tackled.

14. Mr. RIEDEL referred to an article in a recent issue of The Observer, a newspaper which had reported that government expenditure on social security would exceed £4 billion. While that figure was encouraging, he wondered whether there was any truth in the claim that the Government intended to abolish lone parent premiums and One Parent Benefits for new claimants and, if so, what the justification was. How would the quality of life for single parents and their families be improved under such conditions and would housing benefits be increased?

15. Mr. ADEKUOYE noted that the answer to his query about entry clearance for spouses and fiancés had been answered on the basis of information already given in the written reply to paragraph 63 of the list of issues. Nevertheless, it was his impression that, in the main, such applications were refused without recourse to higher authorities. There were indeed cases in which persons attempted to seek residence status under false pretences, but he was aware that a number of genuine cases were often thrown out without any attempt on the part of the authorities to establish the authenticity of the applicants' intentions. He wished to know what remedies were available for persons who were refused entry.

16. Ms. THORNE (United Kingdom) said she agreed with Mr. Sadi that the issue of domestic violence could not be resolved solely in workshops. It was essential to strengthen the family unit. A broad range of action with input from various departments and sectors was needed. Workshops did provide such a forum for bringing together persons who had the capacity to influence the process of improvement. One achievement in that regard was the enactment of the Family Law Reform Act, which provided for compulsory counselling before divorce could be granted.

17. With reference to Mr. Rattray's question, there were provisions in the Children Act 1989 to monitor the welfare of children in foster care, and a social service inspectorate for services provided, regulated or used by local

authorities to look after children. The Utting Report had been issued only the previous week and its observations and recommendations would certainly be the subject of extensive consultation and debate.

18. Mr. FIFOOT (United Kingdom) said it was always hoped that decisions on the fate of asylum seekers were correct, but he assured Mr. Texier that there was a process whereby persons who were not accepted as refugees might be granted limited or unlimited exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom. Former residents of Hong Kong who had lost their British Dependent Territory status and failed to qualify for Chinese citizenship were granted full British citizenship under the Hong Kong Order 1997, which entitled them to all rights in the United Kingdom. Again, there were appropriate rules for the right of entry to join a spouse resident in the United Kingdom. Remedy was available on appeal to an independent immigration adjudicator.

19. Miss MOORE (United Kingdom) said that the number of lone parents, and particularly lone parents' dependants, receiving benefits had increased very considerably over the past 10 years. The previous Government had taken the view that one possible reason for the increase was the fact that lone parents received a comparatively larger share of social benefits than did a family with both parents. It had therefore provided, before leaving office, for the reduction in the special amount of additional benefits payable to lone parents in the case of new claimants.

20. The present Government felt that, because of its commitment to maintaining the planned levels of public expenditure, it had no option but to continue those reductions in the amounts payable to new claimants. However, it had taken substantial steps to ensure that lone parents with the lowest incomes were encouraged to work and, because of additional in-work benefits for low-income families with children in the United Kingdom, a lone parent who entered work and was supported by in-work benefits would on average receive £50 more each week than when out of work and in receipt of income support. Clearly, there was a complex of additional supports and reasons behind the changes that were not unrelated to Mr. Sadi's concern about strengthening the family unit.

Article 11. The right to an adequate standard of living

21. Mr. SADI said that he had hoped the arrival of the Labour Government would reverse the disturbing trend reflected in the widening gap between rich and poor. He therefore asked for the delegation's comments on the situation. In his opinion, the gap between the rich and the poor could not be automatically bridged by work, as was suggested in the written reply to paragraph 65 of the issues. Economic planning could help in that regard. Again, was there any truth in reports that there were more children living in poverty than in the 1980s and that 65 per cent of disabled persons lived below the poverty line? He also drew attention to the fact that a homelessness survey had indicated that approximately 300,000 young people had been homeless in 1995.

22. Mr. RIEDEL, referring to the written reply to paragraph 68 of the list of issues, asked what insights the database of food and low income projects had given into the problem of poor nutrition, which affected many developed countries, especially those in Western Europe.

23. The government list of applicants for rehousing for April 1996 had put the number of homeless in England at 116,000, and in Scotland and Wales at 30,000 each, but the actual figures were probably considerably higher. What action had been taken in the interim to reduce the level of homelessness, which appeared principally to affect the elderly, children and the disabled, or to deal with the 1.4 million houses unfit for habitation and the 2.3 million in need of drastic renovation in 1996? Moreover, why were asylum seekers apparently not eligible for entry on the single housing register kept by local authorities for allocation of social housing and eligible only for provisional accommodation until a ruling had been made on their claim?

24. Although satisfied with the reply given with respect to Travellers in Northern Ireland, he asked why a group of 30 Traveller vehicles had recently been forcibly prevented by the police from joining other Travellers camped on a site in England. Was the treatment of Travellers different in the two parts of the country?

25. Mr. ANTANOVICH said that the wealth of information provided by the United Kingdom on article 11 seemed more a description of living standards, average income levels and other factors than of the degree to which the right to an adequate standard of living was being met. He asked whether there was any current legal or sociological definition in the United Kingdom of what was deemed to be an adequate standard of living, so as to give a frame of reference for judging the mass of statistics provided and determining how many people were failing to reach that standard.

26. Mr. PILLAY said he welcomed the large amount of information generally provided by the report, but was disappointed that the written reply to paragraph 71 of the list of issues had given so little coverage of forced eviction. Eviction concerned not only tenants but also the homeless, squatters and Travellers. The Committee's guidelines required a State party in its report to provide statistics on forced evictions; there was also an obligation on States parties to provide alternative accommodation for evicted persons, who were frequently very vulnerable.

27. Mr. TEXIER asked how, in the case of eviction further to a court decision on a dispute between landlord and tenant, the State reconciled conflicts between the right to ownership of property and the right to housing - both of which rights were enshrined in the law of most countries. In cases where tenants, for reasons beyond their control, were unable to meet rent payments, did eviction take place without consideration of the circumstances or of efforts to find them alternative accommodation? Was there any system, as in France, where evictions were suspended during winter months to prevent undue hardship?

28. In addition, in cases where it was necessary to appropriate housing to make way for public construction projects, such as roads or public buildings, were any negotiations held before the eviction or was alternative accommodation provided?

29. Mr. MARCHAN ROMERO asked what measures were in place to ensure that the children of Travellers had proper access to education. He also wished to know how nomadic groups were viewed by the legal system, especially those that moved between countries as Gypsy populations did in parts of Europe.

30. Mr. ADEKUOYE asked whether the Scottish Diet Action Group mentioned in paragraph 144 of the third report had produced its strategy as expected and, if so, what its main features were. The report acknowledged that there was a very high incidence of coronary disease and stroke. In view of the long-running campaign to reduce that high incidence, what factors were considered to be responsible? Were there any hopes that it would decline in the future? As to hunger and malnutrition, it seemed that some one million people entitled to claim income support failed to do so. Was that due to lack of communication about the availability of the benefit?

31. Mr. RATTRAY said he doubted that the real situation with regard to poverty could be expressed in terms of statistical averages, particularly in view of the wide gap between the highest and the lowest incomes. Perhaps the strategy being used to deal with the issue needed to be re-examined. The problem was perhaps being exacerbated by reliance on market forces and the increasing trend towards privatization. In particular, what effect had the privatization of the water authorities had on water quality?

32. It was noticeable that, regardless of the particular difficulties in what was a relatively rich society with impressive legal safeguards, it generally seemed to be the same groups that were affected, for example, women and especially various ethnic groups. In the context of the right to an adequate standard of living, there was perhaps a need to re-examine the philosophy of addressing poverty as a structural matter in order to resolve the disparity.

33. Mr. CEVILLE asked what measures were available to local authorities to make sure that homeless families were rehoused. He would welcome some examples of how such procedures worked in practice.

34. Miss MOORE (United Kingdom) said that, as she had explained in connection with article 9, the perception of poverty depended very much on the means used to measure it. The figure Mr. Sadi had mentioned of one child in three living in poverty had been taken from annual government data on the number of families living below 50 per cent of average income, when total income from all sources was taken into account. When allowance was made for purchasing power in the various countries, the figure represented by that percentage was the third highest in the European Union. Therefore, it was not appropriate to use it to measure poverty - it was a measure of inequality, which was a quite different concept.

35. To answer Mr. Antanovich, a considerable amount of work had been done in recent years to determine what poverty was and how to respond adequately to

it. One puzzling finding had been that some people, who from available income information appeared to be among the least well off, were spending much more and maintaining a higher standard of living than many other groups. Hence, any measure of the adequacy of living standards would have to take real expenditure, and the quality and availability of housing, into account as well as income. Between 1979 and 1994-1995, average income in the United Kingdom had risen by some 37 per cent overall and by 50 per cent among persons in full-time work. That was why the Government considered that getting people into work was the best way to move them out of the lowest income brackets. It was very difficult to provide as high an income to people wholly dependent on social assistance benefits as that received by people in gainful employment. Nevertheless, there were annual increases in the value of social security benefits, in particular retirement pensions.

36. As had been pointed out by Mr. Adekuoye, some one million people failed to take up their entitlement to income support. The Government had found on investigation that it was generally people with the smallest amount of entitlement who did not take up the benefit, for a number of reasons. Some were living in households with a good standard of living and felt no need to claim the small amount of extra benefit, while others were too proud to do so. In a trial conducted by the Government, elderly people had been informed of the additional income to which they would be entitled by claiming means-tested benefits and the relevant forms had been completed for signature, but a high proportion had refused to sign. It was not possible to force people to take up benefits; all that could be done was to make the relevant information available.

37. Mr. FIFOOT (United Kingdom) said there were two broad categories of housing in the United Kingdom, owner-occupied housing or social housing. A great deal of social housing had been transferred to housing association ownership and had thus benefited from greater private funding. The decision to determine who would occupy social housing lay with the local authorities, the allocation being made with a view to long-term occupancy. A person allocated a tenancy by a local authority was entitled to occupy the house in question for life, provided the relevant requirements regarding payment of the rent and maintaining the house in reasonable condition were complied with. A single register of persons scheduled for allocation of social housing had to be kept and published by local authorities. Priority in the allocation of social housing went to persons occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing, persons occupying temporary or insecure housing, families with dependent children, households in which a member was expecting a child and the homeless.

38. Local authorities also had the quite different responsibility of providing short-term accommodation, or finding it in the private sector, for persons who were homeless or threatened with homelessness. Priority in the allocation of such accommodation went to people with dependent children or vulnerable persons such as the elderly, pregnant women or the disabled. The obligation was to provide the accommodation for a two-year period, but if the persons concerned were still without a permanent home, in social housing or otherwise, at the end of that period the obligation would be renewed for a further two years. Asylum seekers, if homeless, were entitled to short-term accommodation under the same conditions. However, until a decision had been

taken to grant them refugee status they were not considered as settled in the country and thus were not eligible for long-term tenancy of social housing.

39. Reference had been made to a report claiming that a quarter of a million young people were homeless. He felt it had become a somewhat fixed idea of the Committee that homelessness and other social ills only affected the young, the old and the disabled. That blanket supposition did not help to clarify the problem; a proper breakdown of the categories involved in each instance was necessary. In the case of homelessness, for example, other categories were also included in the figure. In any event, the simple figure of a quarter of a million homeless persons in 1995 did not reflect the fact that a large proportion were probably housed in temporary accommodation. Homelessness did not necessarily mean rooflessness.

40. There were, of course, persons who were roofless, people who were sleeping rough. However, independent counts by the voluntary sector showed that the number of people sleeping rough over the years had fallen to some 300 in any one night in central London from an estimated 1,000 at the start of the Rough Sleepers Initiative in 1990. The Initiative, launched by the Department of the Environment and the Department of Health to support efforts throughout the country to reduce rough sleeping, had among other things provided special facilities and accommodation for people suffering from mental ill health or alcohol or drug abuse. In recent years, the Department of Health had made some £2.6 million available to fund psychiatric care, special rehabilitation hostels and permanent accommodation for the homeless mentally ill. An additional £8.1 million would be found from April 1998 to tackle single person homelessness, focusing in particular on young people.

41. The United Kingdom had some 20 million houses, about 1.4 million of which were in some way unfit for habitation. There were different degrees of such unfitness and the Government was providing considerable funds during the current year for housing regeneration through grants and large-scale city regeneration programmes. Some three quarters of the unfit housing was in the private sector, the majority of such houses being owner-occupied. A number of types of grants were available to owners to enable them to improve or repair their housing or make it more suitable for special needs, such as those of the disabled.

42. In the matter of eviction, the figures provided applied solely to the private sector, where it was necessary to strike a balance between the interests of landlord and tenant. Eviction orders were not absolute: if a tenant could not pay his rent, the court could use its discretionary power to suspend the order, on the understanding that the tenant would resume paying the rent and make an effort to pay off back-rent. In 1996, there had been 8,970 absolute eviction orders and 8,296 suspended orders. If a tenant was evicted from private housing, he was eligible for public housing and one of the eligibility criteria for public housing was, in fact, eviction from private housing. If he continued to meet the terms of public housing, he could remain an occupant for life.

43. Both Great Britain and Northern Ireland had many drinking-water inspectorates. In Great Britain, inspections were carried out at taps, reservoirs, and distribution points; water was tested against 55 parameters

with numerical standards and 2 with descriptive standards. In Northern Ireland, water was tested against 71 parameters. In both Great Britain and Northern Ireland, tests had shown that water quality met the relevant standards, and even when it did not, it was still potable. In Great Britain, 99.7 per cent of water standard tests passed; in Northern Ireland, that figure was 98.19.

44. Mr. MACE (United Kingdom) said that, under the United Kingdom definition, Travellers included not only Romany Gypsies, but also Irish Travellers, fairground families, circus families, bargees and other inhabitants of boats, and new-age hippies. Travellers enjoyed the same legal status as other citizens of the United Kingdom. The Race Relations Act 1976 established special protection concerning discrimination against those persons. For example, signs on public houses reading "No Travellers" had once been common; they were now illegal. Various departments took care of the general health and welfare of Travellers. Under current policy, local authorities were asked to provide sites for them. The previous Government had encouraged the development of private sites and statistics had accordingly shown a significant increase in the number of such sites in recent years.

45. The United Kingdom took pride in its national educational system for members of the Traveller community. Its basic policy was, of course, to provide education to Travellers in the same way as it did to other communities. But an additional programme, which was budgeted at approximately £10 million per annum and serviced 3,400 schools each year, provided special peripatetic teaching staff and educational support staff, among them educational welfare officers whose task was to promote school attendance by Travellers and to establish a rapport with Traveller families. The results had been dramatic. Whereas in the 1970s only 20 per cent of Gypsy children of primary school age had attended school, in the 1990s, that figure stood at 90 per cent. Significant progress had also been made in improving attendance and achievement among Gypsy and Traveller children of secondary school age.

46. Furthermore, under its basic policy approach to the matter of equal opportunity for Gypsies and Travellers, the Government sought to link their concerns with those of other ethnic minorities, including Africans and Asians. Thus, for instance, the Government Task Group on raising ethnic minority achievement included a special Gypsy and Traveller dimension. The United Kingdom had promoted measures on behalf of Gypsies and Travellers within the context of the European Community and had participated in the development of teaching materials designed to provide continuous learning to Traveller children during the travelling season.

47. The delegation could, if the Committee so wished, provide details on numerous other relevant provisions, among them a special dispensation protecting Gypsy families from prosecution if their children had low school attendance records.

Article 12. The right to physical and mental health

48. Mr. SADI said it would be useful to learn of the Government's attitude towards cigarette advertising and the Formula One controversy, whether cancer and heart-attack rates had declined, and whether the medical system was being restructured to avoid the two-tier phenomenon.

49. Mr. THAPALIA said that information on the health status of children in the United Kingdom, including the children of immigrants and ethnic minorities, would be welcome. It would also be useful to know the percentage of the gross national product and the national budget that was allocated to health, and the current status and incidence of HIV/AIDS.

50. The CHAIRPERSON, speaking as a member of the Committee, said that up-to-date information on the evolution of mad cow disease would be helpful.

51. Mr. RATTRAY, noting that the medical care system in the United Kingdom was renowned for efficiency and excellence, inquired what measures had been taken to reduce the excessively long waiting list for surgical treatment.

52. Ms. THORNE (United Kingdom) said measures had been taken to study a possible reorganization of the health-care system to eliminate any tendencies toward the two-tier phenomenon, and the publication of a white paper was anticipated. She had no precise figures either for heart disease or for cancer. Coronary heart disease was indeed a substantial problem in the United Kingdom, as it was in many European countries. Diet, smoking, exercise, and genetic composition were all factors. The Government had undertaken extensive health promotion campaigns, targeting coronary heart disease and stroke, and the public had shown signs of responding. As with all diseases related to lifestyle, instant results were unlikely. Some forms of cancer were increasing; others were decreasing. With regard to women, breast cancer afflicted 1 in 12, but lung cancer, related to the surge in smoking by women in the wake of the Second World War, was rapidly gaining ground. The Government was committed to issuing a ban on cigarette advertising and supported the related European Union directive. It had been acknowledged that such bans adversely affected sports, and an understanding had been reached that in cases like that of Formula One, which could legitimately argue special circumstances, cigarette advertising might be phased out gradually.

53. Access to health care was the same for immigrant children as it was for any other children in the United Kingdom. In communities with large immigrant populations, special efforts were made at the local level to consult representatives of such populations, to create programmes specially adapted to their cultural needs and to provide literature in the relevant language which described to parents those medical services available for their children.

54. Budget allocations for HIV/AIDS in 1998/1999 amounted to £228.5 million, 11 per cent more than for the current year. In 1997, the incidence of AIDS had declined in response to the use of combination therapy and the incidence of death from AIDS had dropped by 35 per cent.

55. An action plan, which included the establishment of a national task force, had been devised to tackle the problem of the waiting list for surgery,

and £300 million were allocated for that purpose. Particular attention would be paid to providing treatment to those who had waited for 18 months or longer. A further £5 million had been earmarked for the development of new ways to reduce waiting time.

56. As of late September, 22 cases of the new variant of CJD had emerged in the country. The worldwide incidence, at approximately 1.1 per million, was about the same as that of the United Kingdom. Measures had been launched to protect public health, to expand research efforts and to monitor the incidence of the disease. In the current budget, overall expenditures on health services amounted to £33,000 million.

Articles 13 and 14. The right to education

57. Mr. TEXIER said a national survey in September had shown that 1 adult in 5, or 8,400,000 British citizens, while not illiterate, lacked the basic literacy skills required to cope with the realities of daily life. What measures, if any, had the United Kingdom Government undertaken to redress that problem?

58. Mr. CEAUSU noted that the reply to paragraph 84 of the list of issues stated that primary and secondary education must, by law, be free, but also that schools could request voluntary contributions from parents. The use of such funds to increase teacher salaries in richer communities would undoubtedly disadvantage poorer ones. What school activities were financed by such contributions?

59. Mr. RATTRAY inquired, first, how the salaries of teachers and civil servants with similar years of experience compared, and second, how the growing proportion of women in the teaching profession affected school discipline, the conduct of children, and their preparation for later life.

60. Mr. THAPALIA pointed out that human rights education did not constitute a compulsory subject in the national curriculum, and was merely offered as an optional course for 15 and 16 year olds. In that regard, the Government should describe the measures it had taken within the context of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education.

61. Adult education enabled those with insufficient education to achieve their potential and, as such, was especially important for immigrants and women. What groups did the United Kingdom focus its attention on in developing adult education programmes?

62. Mr. AHMED said that, despite the express wishes of many Irish parents, integrated schools still accommodated only 2 per cent of the school age population of Northern Ireland. Unquestionably, teaching Catholic and Protestant children in segregated schools where they were instructed in their own religions perpetuated the social conflict. What measures, if any, were being taken to redress that situation?

63. Mr. RIEDEL asked whether, in view of the high numbers of children expelled from school, the Government was thinking of establishing statutory

criteria on expulsions. Had it contemplated, first, requesting all schools to monitor the ethnic origin of expelled students, and second, establishing measures to reduce the number of expulsions?

64. Mr. PILLAY inquired whether the Government intended to eliminate corporal punishment in privately-funded schools.

65. The CHAIRPERSON, speaking as a member of the Committee, asked whether high university tuition fees had an impact on access by poor students to university education.

66. Mr. MACE (United Kingdom), replying first to a question by Mr. Texier about literacy, said that raising standards of literacy and numeracy lay at the very heart of the Government's commitment to improving educational standards and it was a central plank of the White Paper on Excellence in Schools. The targets set were very ambitious, namely, by 2002, 75 per cent of 11-year-olds would have reached the standards expected for their age in mathematics and 80 per cent in English. That would be a considerable improvement over the current situation. The key elements of the national strategy included training for head teachers, school literacy coordinators and governors, a daily dedicated hour for literacy teaching to be introduced as from the autumn of 1998, training of primary schoolteachers, intensive support in training for schools which had the furthest to go in meeting the Government's national target, reliance on 200 consultants to provide training and support for professional development in schools, school literacy plans and the allocation of three training days for primary schoolteachers to improve their skills. The strategy was supported by £50 million in funding for 1998/1999 alone, of which £21 million would go to updating the skills of some 190,000 primary schoolteachers.

67. As to Mr. Ceausu's question on voluntary contributions to schools, the principle of such donations was not unique to the United Kingdom. As it was voluntary, it was for donors to decide what the money was used for, but he was not aware of its being used to increase teachers' pay. Normally, voluntary contributions might go for the purchase of books and equipment, new facilities, for example a swimming pool, various maintenance needs, and so on. The Government was very aware that preferential treatment must not be given to one school at the expense of another.

68. With regard to Mr. Rattray's question, teachers' pay compared favourably to that of government education officers. Between 1992 and 1996, local education officers' average pay had risen from £10.71 per hour to £12.47 per hour, whereas for secondary schoolteachers, it had increased from £10.98 to £14.54 per hour. As to the question about women teachers, he was not aware of any studies on the impact of women teachers on discipline. He himself had served on a national committee of inquiry into school discipline several years ago, and that had not emerged at all as an issue. He knew of no evidence showing that women were likely to have less disciplined classes.

69. Mr. Thapalia had raised an important question about human rights education. Just a few days ago, the new Government had announced the creation of an Advisory Group on education for citizenship and the teaching of democracy in schools, which would inevitably cover the teaching of human

rights. The Group's report would feed into the forthcoming review of the national curriculum. Set up to boost citizenship, the Group was a high-powered body chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons. The fact that human rights teaching was not compulsory in history classes reflected a concern in the teaching profession that the national curriculum should not be too prescriptive, but should merely provide a broad framework. The main purpose of the ongoing review of the curriculum was to give greater academic freedom and respond to teachers' valid concerns about curriculum overload. Human rights issues were taken up in history classes, however. Topics included the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the history of the Holocaust was also taught.

70. In respect of the questions raised concerning adult education, Miss Scott had referred the day before to the forthcoming White Paper on lifelong learning, which would target that very issue. The Government was conscious of the need for retraining and more flexible skills in response to changing labour markets and demands. One part of its policy was to offer education to those who might have missed out. A number of measures had been taken to offer higher education access courses to young people from ethnic minorities and secure a more balanced ethnic representation in higher education. As for the question on the conditions of teaching staff, a number of steps had been taken recently to improve the status of teachers, who had felt overburdened by the increasing demands of the profession. The Education Bill, which would be brought before Parliament soon, foresaw a new grade of advanced teacher with enhanced pay and status and new measures for initial and in-service training. In connection with the teaching workload, both the previous and the present Governments had been seeking to cut down on bureaucracy. The Department of Education was under strict instructions to reduce the amount of paperwork in schools to an essential minimum.

71. Increasing exclusions certainly gave cause for concern. His Government was aware that there had been disproportionate exclusions of pupils of ethnic origin, in particular African, Caribbean and Gypsy children. The problem was being tackled by the Advisory Group on raising minority group achievement. Pupils could only be excluded on reasonable grounds. It would, however, be too prescriptive to legislate on the precise circumstances in which schools could or could not exclude pupils. The Education Act 1997 required schools to draw up their own discipline policies, setting out standards of behaviour and indicating what sanctions would be applied and the standards of breach. Thus, there was a system of school accountability, clear rules and transparency. The Act required head teachers to make school discipline policy known to parents and pupils every year. The Department did not hesitate to intervene in cases in which a school or educational authority acted in an unreasonable manner.

72. As to the Chairperson's question about university tuition fees, provision was made for exemptions in the case of students from poorer families.

73. Mr. FIFOOT (United Kingdom), referring to the question by Mr. Ahmed, said progress had in fact been made in integrating schools in Northern Ireland. As of January 1997, there had been 32 grant-aided integrated schools in Northern Ireland, including 11 secondary schools. The

policy was to encourage integration in Northern Ireland in accordance with the wishes of the parents. The current policy was to achieve integration of existing schools, whereas in the past the majority of integrated schools had been new schools. Only five pre-existing schools had been integrated. If a suggestion was made to integrate an existing school, the parents were asked for their opinion and, if they agreed, an assessment was made as to whether the school would be likely to be attended by a reasonable number of both Protestant and Catholic pupils. The Department of Education in Northern Ireland had been very careful not to set any pre-existing level of integration from the outset. The aim was to see whether, at the end of the first year, there was evidence of sufficient integration, which at that stage would be about 10 per cent of annual enrolment.

74. As to Mr. Pillay's question on corporal punishment, he was not aware that the Government had made a statement on that point.

75. Ms. JIMENEZ BUTRAGUEÑO asked whether civil servants, for example members of the police force and judges, were instructed in human rights. Given the problems encountered in Northern Ireland, it was important for such persons to be alive to the need to avoid religious discrimination. Did the White Paper contain a provision covering that issue?

76. Mr. SADI said he was concerned about the Government's position regarding parental consent for integration of schools in Northern Ireland. The experience of the United States showed that, had school integration there been dependent on obtaining the parents' consent, no progress would have been made. If a new generation of people willing to live together was to be created in Northern Ireland, it was necessary to go beyond parental consent.

77. Mr. AHMED, following up Mr. Sadi's comment, said that, according to the 1994 report of the Committee on the Administration of Justice, research suggested that approximately 30 per cent of parents in Northern Ireland would like to send their children to integrated schools and that approximately 80 per cent believed it important for children to be educated together. He hoped those findings would encourage the Government of the United Kingdom to accelerate the school integration process.

78. The CHAIRPERSON, speaking as a member of the Committee, said he had been under the impression that Church and State were separated and that the State was neutral on matters of religion. Was the Anglican Church a State religion?

79. Mr. FIFOOT (United Kingdom) said that the United Kingdom had an established church - the Church of England - which performed certain State functions, the obvious example being coronations, but there was complete religious toleration and no discrimination against any church or religion.

80. In reply to Mr. Sadi, he pointed out that, pursuant to article 13, paragraph 3, of the Covenant, States parties undertook to have respect for the liberty of parents to choose schools other than those established by the public authorities and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions. Although his Government's

policy was to work towards school integration, account must be taken of the population's wishes. As he saw it, that was an example of a certain tension between the Covenant and democratic expression.

81. As to the question by Ms. Jimenez Butragueño about education in human rights for the police and other civil servants, the police forces were in fact continually made aware of the need to avoid discrimination and to ensure that they were even-handed in performing their duties.

82. Mr. SADI, referring to article 15, on the right to culture, noted that the Department of National Heritage responsible for cultural matters had been renamed the Department for Culture, Media and Sports. The inclusion of cultural matters with media and sports suggested that the impact of culture had been diluted. In a country that was becoming increasingly multicultural, should not culture be given greater prominence?

83. Mr. FIFOOT (United Kingdom) said the change of name was an indication of how important the media were for the dissemination of culture. There might be some question as to whether sports were cultural; some forms certainly would appear to be. But the point of merging the three elements was to create a single Department capable of dealing with what might be called the recreational part of national life. In no way did it diminish the Department's responsibility for the arts. Indeed, the change had probably given the arts higher priority.

84. Mr. RATTRAY asked whether the Government had taken any policy decision with regard to human cloning and, if so, whether the decision was consistent with the right of choice.

85. Mr. FIFOOT (United Kingdom) said he did not think that any policy decision had been taken on that problem, which was of enormous complexity. The Human Genetics Advisory Commission, whose terms of reference were to keep scientific progress in human genetics and related fields under review and report periodically to the Government, had met for the first time earlier in the year.

86. Ms. JIMENEZ BUTRAGUEÑO asked whether any documentation was available about the participation of the elderly in society. Was the experience of such persons tapped by universities and the private sector?

87. Mrs. SCOTT (United Kingdom) said that the policy of both the previous and the present Governments was that there should be no discrimination against older workers. Since 1992, there had been a working group on the subject. The Government had just begun consultations on whether there should be statutory coverage to prevent discrimination against older workers.

88. Mr. ANTANOVICH, thanking the delegation for the abundance of information provided, said that even for a country as wealthy as the United Kingdom, the Covenant could serve as a yardstick of social and economic life.

89. Mr. TEXIER said he joined Mr. Antanovich in commending the delegation of the United Kingdom on its dialogue with the Committee.

90. Mr. RIEDEL, likewise expressing appreciation to the delegation, said that the information received from many NGOs in the United Kingdom had been exemplary, and he recommended that their views should be taken into account in drafting future reports.

91. Mr. AHMED said he hoped that, when the United Kingdom presented its next report, it would be in a position to fill in all the gaps which had been inevitable because the many initiatives of the new Government had not yet had time to take hold.

92. Mr. RATTRAY, also expressing gratitude to the delegation, said he hoped that there was recognition of the fact that the world was changing and that strategies devised for today which turned out to be inappropriate tomorrow would need to be altered.

93. Mr. PIFOOT (United Kingdom) thanked the members of the Committee for their kind words and for their courteous treatment of the delegation.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.